

Western MRS Meeting Notes
October 30, 2006
St. John's Episcopal Church Asheville

Counties Present: Buncombe, Caldwell, Catawba, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Iredell, Jackson, Yancey,

Introductions

Announcements

Defining In-Home

Supporting Child Only Cases

Announcements

- New worker, Gretchen Williams, on the Work First policy and staff development teams (half time for each). Will be working on developing training for Work First
- Deficit Reduction Act (WF) requires a lot of different things for WF, they are in the process of changing things to meet Federal Regulations. Started 10/1 but WF did not get the requirements until after 10/1.
 - Participation rate is the same (50% for families, 90% for 2 parent families – NC is around 38 or 39%)
 - If we do not make the rate, the money may not be available; therefore it is important that we, as a state, make this rate.
 - This act has given federal definitions.

Defining In-Home

We talked a couple of months ago about defining CFT's, and WF collaboration. Now we want to do the same thing with In-Home Services. Duke in particular wants to know what do they need to see when we say "in-home" services were redesigned.

When we were talking to Duke they asked if case management just meant that SW just went out and talked to folks? We (state) said no, it was more than that, so Duke needs to know - what more was it?

Reviewed responses from the east (in italics)

- *Make sure they have done a home visit, who was seen at this visit, document that the in home services agreement was done with the family.*
- *Talking about the progress that has been made at each visit.*
- *Documentation of referrals to other services and the response of the family (did they follow up on the referrals?)*
- *One county does a joint 7 day visit, talk about the CFT at that time and start thinking about where it will be and who will be invited. (CFTs going well, have had at homes, agency, churches, therapist's offices; having good participation.)*
- *Documentation of assessment (Structured Decision Making) tools and why you feel that strengths and needs are what they are. Don't just have a rating, have an explanation.*
- *Documentation of collateral contacts.*
- Haywood felt that was a good list. They have developed a checklist type form they use in staffing and reviewing cases. This serves as a reminder and as a way to ensure that everything was done.

- Recommendation from the state that they staff high risk cases weekly – Buncombe thinks that there should be notes in the record that this happened. (Have a staffing form.)
 - This is not a requirement, just a recommendation, but that is a lot of staffing. Holly asked if these were formal staffings or were some of them more casual. Try to keep them formal as much as possible, particularly the more serious ones, and the form allows you to document.
- Barriers – we want to document progress, but also the barriers that the families are facing. These will change throughout the case.
- Show that Structured Decision Making is done with the family and that Case Plans are developed in the CFT and the families ideas were included or at least thoroughly discussed, and if not included, why not?

Supporting Child Only Cases

New WF rep in the West – she emailed Holly a question regarding child only cases. Situation: A relative took in a small child years ago and now that they are a teenager, they are not sure that they can handle them. How do we support those placements and who is responsible for this? What does WF need from CPS in these cases, and what can CPS do for Work First to try to prevent them from becoming CPS cases down the line.

- Feeling that the other community agencies that were providing services sometimes dump these cases back to DSS as the last resort.
- Iredell tries to explore all the future issues when they place the child as a youngster. They talk to caretakers when the child is young about the issues that may develop when he/she gets older. Put it all out on the table up front.
- Some counties System of Care groups will let you know that something is brewing before it overflows. Usually the children are involved with some agency before they blow up and end up a CPS case back at DSS.
- Child only cases are about 60% of Work First cases.
- Sybil requires her counties to do one home visit per year. The Child Welfare workers do this (she is not sure how they decide who will do this since it is not an active CPS case but it does get done.)
 - Suggestion that CPS and WF collaborate on these visits – sometimes something “feels” wrong to the WF worker on a visit, so the CPS worker may have more insights – maybe it was just a bad day at the home, or maybe there were underlying issues.
 - Doesn’t matter who sees the child, but someone needs to see them periodically.
- Catawba takes those instances as outreach cases.
- Buncombe suggested something similar to post adoption services, placement stabilization services. If that was a formal process in place by the state that would encourage counties to do this.
- Cleveland – planning to start a caregiver support group.
- Catawba has one of these.
- Buncombe borrowed a kinship care handbook from Catawba county and modified it to develop it for Buncombe county. They give this to all kinship placements as a resource.
- WF can call a CFT as well, does not have to be CPS that calls them.

- The family can also ask for one, they may not remember who their CPS worker from 7 years ago was (or that person may not be with the agency anymore) but since the family is still getting a check they at least sort of know who their WF worker is. They may call that person and let them know they are having trouble, and the WF worker can contact CPS and community agencies and have a CFT.

In order for this to work, it is imperative that your employees know each other and what everyone does. It is an investment up front, but will pay off in the long run.

- At county staff meetings, one agency has a “Unit of the Month” where each month a different agency tells what they do
- Orientation for new employees where for one whole day different people come present on their area.
- This is now a part of pre-service as well; they are supposed to make these contacts in their off week when they are back at their agencies.
- Haywood planning to do a breakfast where CPS and WF can meet. By doing it first thing in the morning in the hope that workers will not already be caught up in their day and miss it.
- Have talked about lunch and learns also.
- Have to be supported by program managers and supervisors – otherwise they tend not to succeed.

How You Decide to Switch Tracks

In general, how often is this happening and which way is it going?

- Everyone said very infrequently. Usually if they are switching, it is when it comes in as one thing and when they go out they find that there are marks on the child or the child makes a disclosure that makes it an abuse case and it must be switched. Or the family is uncooperative or seems to be hiding something.
- Some cases where it started as investigative and social worker realizes it does not have to be investigative and they want to switch to family.

When you do switch either way, when do you do this, and what is the process?

- Haywood does this at weekly staffing (not the final staffing for case decision – they try to staff all cases weekly.)
- Remember that switching tracks is about the process, not the outcome. Don’t switch to investigative, just because you want to sub it.

What are things that make you want to switch from investigative to family assessment?

- When the report alleges physical injury, and you get out there and that is clearly not the case.
- If there is not enough there to require an investigative assessment, then families do tend to work with the agency better if you are doing a family assessment. That alone is a legitimate reason to switch if the situation does not meet policy requirements for investigative.
- Remember that you need to document why you switch and it needs to be a two level review.

Other Discussion

Buncombe asked if you get to the point where you file a petition; do you automatically switch to an investigative track?

- No one here does it automatically.
- It is the facts of the case that you are adjudicating, not the findings.
- The other side of the fence is that if the judge finds neglect, our finding needs to match.
- People here do not feel that way. For example, you may have a case with a In Need of Services Finding that goes to in home and during in home you may take custody, at that point, you don't go back and change you initial finding.

Buncombe wanted to talk about turnover – she has never been fully staffed – is this unique to Buncombe?

- Gaston has never been fully staffed either – their exit interviews show for them it is mostly money because neighboring counties pay better, but there are always other issues.
- Yancey will be on 11/15 but for the first time in 3 years.
- Iredell wanted to know who was participating in the recruitment retention project (Caldwell and Buncombe, Cleveland)
 - Buncombe thinks that this will help recruit better suited folks. There is a realistic interview, and a video that has actual social workers talk about what the job is really like. It talks about the good things about being a CPS social worker, but also the realistic hardships of the job. It will recognize that not all people are suited to this job.
- Of course, it is a domino effect, when people leave, others get overwhelmed and then they burnout and want to leave.
- Buncombe has talked to their county commissioners to try to make the employment package better.
- Also concerned about the lack of new supervisor's training. Because of the high turnover rate, there are frequently new people in positions and there is not enough training available for these new folks.

Asked if counties had experience with taking undocumented aliens into care. A central county is having issues with this and wanted to know if there were other counties that had experience with this.

- Buncombe has done this with Hispanic children – they are taking this issue up at their next internal meetings. Only have one bi-lingual worker. Need more. She can't carry a full caseload because she has to do everything twice – one copy in Spanish and one in English.
- Buncombe has a local Latino recruitment committee try and recruit Latino professionals in all areas.
- Catawba had a meeting where the Hmong community presented issues, one of which is that there is no certification test for Hmong translators, therefore there is no way to have a certified translator for court, etc.
- It is an incredible expense for the affected counties to translate all the appropriate literature – feel that the state needs to identify all significant minority populations and go ahead and foot the bill to get the materials into the appropriate languages.

Future Meetings and Trainings

MRS Monthly Meetings

- Central Meeting - November 17th Randolph Co
- Western Meeting – November 28th Buncombe Co St. John's Episcopal Church
- Eastern Meeting - November 30th Washington Co

Policy Trainings

- November 29th – MRS Policy Pitt Co
- December 7th – MRS Policy Onslow Co